

# EDUCATION DAILY

The education community's independent daily news service

## Study: K-12, College Gaps Lead Students To Struggle

Disjointed K-12 and higher education policies leave U.S. students unprepared for college-level work, even as record numbers of students report wanting to attend college and employers demand increasingly complex skills, a new study says.

The standards-based reform movement now central to K-12 education has had little connection to colleges and universities, says the report released yesterday by Stanford University's Bridge Project, a six-year national study of standards for high school exit policies and college entrance policies.

Students' college aspirations are higher than ever: roughly eight in 10 eighth-graders report wanting to go to college, and about 70 percent of high school graduates do enroll within two years of getting their diploma, the study notes.

But many students have strong misconceptions about what coursework they need to get into college and, perhaps more importantly, to succeed there, the researchers found.

For example, many students are surprised by placement tests required at community colleges, since those schools have open admissions. And because their high school curriculum did not prepare them for college-level work, many are surprised to learn they must take remedial classes, delaying courses for credit.

### Few Links Between K-12, Higher Ed

Though all states but one have developed academic standards, and many require high school graduation exams, the higher ed community has had little input in the process, said report co-author Michael Kirst, a Stanford University education and business professor.

"We built two mass education systems—K-12 and higher education—and didn't really build a bridge between them," Kirst said.

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## History Textbooks Gloss Over Islam, Says Review

History textbooks perpetuate a double standard when addressing religion, taking a critical stance toward Christianity and other Western religions while glossing over any unsavory aspects of Islam and non-Western civilizations in general, a new report charges.

The report by the American Textbook Council—an independent research organization funded by private foundations—reviewed seven widely adopted history textbooks commonly used in grades 7-12.

Although the textbooks take an unflinching look at Western civilization, they too often ignore or put a good spin on subjects such as: "jihad," which is often translated as "holy war"; the advocacy of violence among militant Islamists; "sharia," the Islamic holy law; Muslims' enslavement of others; and the subjugation of women, according to the report.

### Ignoring The 'Dark Side'?

"Islamic achievements are reported with robust enthusiasm, [but] when any dark side surfaces, textbooks run and hide," wrote Gilbert Sewall, the council's director and a former history teacher and journalist.

One historian concludes that "the object of 'jihad' is to bring the whole world under Islamic law," but textbooks defang the term, Sewall

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## Study: K-12, College Gaps Lead Students To Struggle (Cont.)

That stands in stark contrast to other countries' approach to education, he said. In England, for example, university professors talked with high school teachers, designed exams with them, and generally interacted more closely, he said.

Much of that difference stems from the fact that the U.S. public school system was not originally designed to send most students to college, said Carol Geary Schneider, president of the Association of American Colleges and Universities.

And despite K-12 policymakers' focus on academic standards, most high school graduation exams do not test the skills or knowledge that students will need in college, she argued.

"Most of these so-called high-stakes tests are focused on 10th-grade level work," she said.

Moreover, the K-12 reform movement focuses far too little on the analytical and research skills students will need in college, and high school teachers do not demand tough enough work, Schneider contended.

"Our schools are not giving our students enough of a work ethic," she said, pointing to surveys in which many high school students report spending only five to six hours a week on their homework and continuing those habits in college.

### Mixed Messages From Schools

Part of the problem is that high schools themselves send mixed messages, the researchers found. Between state, district and class-specific assessments, students face such a jumble of tests that they don't always know which ones count, said Andrea Venezia, co-author of the report and K-16 project director at the Stanford Institute for Higher Education Research.

"Students with whom we spoke were very confused about whether what they were taking (more)

### Researchers Seek Focus On 'Broad-Access' Colleges

Policymakers should focus less on elite institutions and more on "broad-access" schools, such as community colleges, that have open admissions policies and enroll about 80 percent of college students, says a report released yesterday by Stanford University's Bridge Project.

Because of gaps between high school graduation tests, college admissions standards and community college placement exams, "students are sort of set up to be in remediation," said co-author Michael Kirst, a professor of education and business administration at Stanford.

Students who pass a high school exit exam in 10th grade may assume they are ready for college, then be blindsided by a placement test, he contended. These problems can be offset by the use of "appropriate" high school exams—such as challenging end-of-course tests—in admissions decisions, as well as more dual-enrollment programs between high schools and community colleges, which would familiarize students with college work, he said.

Several community college students attending yesterday's news conference to release the report said they were caught off guard by placement exams and course demands.

Starting at the Community College of Baltimore County "was like a rude awakening—small fish at a small college," said student Jemel Johnson. Despite having attended a high school with a college-prep focus, she found she needed remediation in what had been some of her strongest subjects, she said.

—H.G.R.

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## Skills Standards Bolster State Vocational Training Efforts

### Perkins Act May Provide Test To Use Skills Framework As Accountability Measure

With industry-based skills standards for vocational training gaining a foothold, state officials say federal policy and funding should complement—rather than inhibit—efforts to use a skills framework as an accountability measure.

As Congress begins efforts to reauthorize several laws with vocational-training components—including the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act and the Workforce Investment Act (WIA)—it should consider ways states and localities have used industry-based skills standards as a common measure of accountability, state officials said at a Feb. 21 policy forum in Washington, D.C.

If states are moving toward using a system of industry-based skills standards, assessments and certifications to bridge the gap between workforce development and workplace needs, then federal funding must supplement those endeavors, Emil Jezik, Kentucky's commissioner of technical education told the forum.

"It takes a lot of time and money to really get this thing rolling," he stressed.

#### Perkins Act Measure

Industry-based skills standards are a perfect method for accountability, especially in Perkins, although the language in the law doesn't specifically spell that out, said Jezik, recommending that language be added to strengthen accountability when the law is reauthorized.

"As the law stands now, the interpretation [of Perkins] is so vast that you could use GPAs to measure accountability," he said.

Using national skills standards in career and technical education programs is a "win-win" situation—the accountability is built in, said Leo Reddy, CEO of the National Coalition of Advanced Manufacturing, who has worked to develop advanced manufacturing national skills standards and assessments for years.

With the national skills standards finally complete, Reddy said the certification exams should be ready in May and will be piloted at the Milwaukee Area Technical College. Without congressional support, however, states could be forced to sacrifice high

standards to meet current federal accountability measures.

For instance, New Jersey's strict skills standards programs—stretching across the state's labor and education departments—count only nationally recognized diplomas, degrees and certificates, which makes meeting federal measures, such as degree attainment, difficult.

In response, the state has considered watering down its credentialing process so as to not risk the loss of federal funding, a move that Dave Novak, senior policy analyst for the New Jersey's employment and training commission, called "ridiculous." Right now, it's almost impossible for New Jersey to meet WIA levels for credentialing attainment because the state took the "high road" from the get-go, he said.

—Travis Hicks

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## K-12, College Gaps Lead Students To Struggle (Cont.)

and being tested on in high school bore any relation to what they would be taking and tested on in college," she said.

Passing a high school graduation test "becomes a signal for students" that they are ready for college, said Gerald Tirozzi, executive director of the National Association of Secondary School Principals. "I think we are sending the wrong message to kids when we do that."

Complicating matters further are gaps between state high school graduation requirements and those for admissions into the same state's public universities. In California, for instance, students must complete only three years of high school English to graduate. But to be considered for admission to a state university, they must have under their belts four years of college-prep English classes with regular writing, and reading of classic and modern literature.

*"Betraying the College Dream: How Disconnected K-12 and Postsecondary Education Systems Undermine Student Aspirations" is available at <http://bridgeproject.stanford.edu>.*

—Hannah Gladfelter Rubin

## W.V. School Liable For Teacher's Sinus Problems

A federal appeals court last week upheld a lower court ruling that awarded a West Virginia teacher \$300,000 because the school where she worked failed to accommodate her respiratory and sinus difficulties.

In a ruling issued Thursday, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals found no grounds to overturn the district court ruling in *Brenda Muovich v. Raleigh County Board of Education* (02-0190).

A special education teacher, Brenda Muovich experienced respiratory problems when she first began working at Coal City Elementary School in Raleigh County, W.V., in 1987.

Her condition got steadily worse over the years, due to several environmental factors, including the installation of new carpet, the use of bleach to clean the bathrooms and cafeteria, and the dispersal of a product called "Gosh" that was used to combat a sewer gas problem at the school, her suit contends.

Muovich repeatedly asked school principal Jerry Redden to help ameliorate her troubles, requesting that he replace the carpet when school was not in session, allow her to switch from cafeteria duty to recess duty, or substitute non-irritating cleaning products.

But she claims Redden always refused. In fact, Redden said "he'd be damned if he would change any cleaning procedures to suit one person," and even told a janitor to spray Gosh into the air but be sure that no one saw him.

By 1996, Muovich had stopped teaching because of her poor health. The next summer, the Raleigh County Board of Education informed her she would be fired if she did not return to work in 30 days.

Muovich replied with a letter from her doctor outlining 29 environmental and medical conditions to be met for her to return to work, but the board did not respond. In 1998, she sued the board, claiming it failed to accommodate her under the Americans with Disabilities Act and West Virginia's Human Rights Act.

After a six-day trial, a federal district court jury awarded her \$300,000 for compensatory damages, back pay and emotional distress, as well as court costs, attorney fees and interest.

The board appealed to the higher court on evidentiary grounds, but the court's three-judge panel found the appeal didn't meet criteria that any errors "seriously affected the fairness, integrity or public reputation" of proceedings."

"We are not persuaded by the Board's argument that no reasonable accommodation would have allowed Muovich to continue working," the judges wrote. "A reasonable jury could have concluded that if the Board had taken early remedial steps as requested by Muovich—such as replacing the carpet during the summer or using cleaning products that were not respiratory irritants—Muovich could have remained in her position at the school."

—Michael Cardman

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## Review: History Texts Gloss Over Islam (Cont. from p. 1)

claims. For instance, one defines the term as a struggle "to do one's best to resist temptation and overcome evil."

Similarly, Sewall charges that the textbooks surveyed fail to explicitly note that effectively there is no separation of church and state under "sharia," with "no distinction between canon law and civil law." Instead, the textbooks define "sharia" abstractly as "the guidance from God to be used by Muslims to regulate their societal and personal affairs."

The report—issued last month—further claims that texts ignore women's place in Islamic societies, and "that Muslim women today are seen by many men to be not much more than chattel." Sewall blames this "romantic view of the Third World" on education activists who "seek a revised world history curriculum."

One textbook publisher, however, denied any undue influence from outside groups. "Claims that the Council on Islamic Education manipulated the editorial process of educational publishers are completely unfounded and are based on speculation and bias," wrote Collin Earnst, spokesman for Houghton Mifflin Co.

Access "Islam and the Textbooks" online at [www.historytextbooks.org](http://www.historytextbooks.org).

—Michael Cardman